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TO: State AF/C Kevin Aiston
Fax #: 202-647-1726
FROM: Embassy Kigali
SUBJECT: Draft Cable - Recon to Southwestern Rwanda

Drafted: Pol-Mil: AMarley
Cleared: Charge: JLeader

SUBJECT: Reconnaissance Trip to Southwestern Rwanda

1. Summary: Pol-Miloff conducted a road reconnaissance of southwestern Rwanda 26-27 August. Population density within the region has decreased noticeably during the past five days. There is a backlog of approximately 2000 refugees waiting to cross into Zaire at the Rusizi II bridge. There is no evidence of additional movement from elsewhere in the region toward the Zaire border. Truck convoys are moving civilians back towards Butare, Gitarama and Kigali from the Humanitarian Zone. End summary.

2. AF Pol-Miloff conducted a road reconnaissance of southwestern Rwanda 26-27 August, covering the route Kigali-Butare-Gikongoro-Cyangugu-Kibuye-Gitarama. The population of Butare continues to grow. There are at present two operational service stations (with fuel on hand), and the largest bicycle repair facility (outdoor)/chop shop seen thus far in Rwanda. The food market is busy, and a bakery and several drinks and brochettes stands are operating as well.

3. There is noticeably less population density in Gikongoro than there was five days earlier. Few refugees/displaced persons are now seen along the roads or in town. This is the case throughout the Humanitarian Protection Zone. UNAMIR Military Observers in Gikongoro indicated that UNHCR is organizing daily convoys in Gikongoro of personnel wishing to return to Butare and Kigali. In addition to those convoys, UNAMIR permits displaced personnel to return home in the otherwise empty cargo trucks used to resupply the UN observers and peacekeeping troops in the HPZ. (Note: The UNHCR Representative told Charge on 26 August that IOM and UNHCR had sent a total of 21 trucks to Cyangugu to bring displaced persons back to their homes. End note.)

4. The British 23rd Para Field Ambulance Company has displaced from Ruhengeri and located its field hospital at a tea plantation immediately east of the Nyungwe Forest, just off the Gikongoro-Cyangugu highway. From this new location, it is servicing the medical needs of approximately a dozen displaced camps in the southeastern part of the HPZ. British medical officers confirmed that the population density is decreasing in the zone, with the majority of the persons returning to their homes in GoR-controlled Rwanda. They did say that one large camp in their sector continues to grow, however: an elongated camp stretching from Mubuga-Kibeho

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now reportedly has approximately 200,000 displaced persons. The British believe the growth may be a function of better food distribution to the camp by the international community than was the case at other camps in the sector.

5. No displaced persons were observed moving westward in the Nyungwe Forest. One family of five, carrying their household goods, was seen walking eastward through the forest. Additionally, on 26 August, a convoy of trucks operated by the Office of International Migrations (OIM/IOM) carrying 400-450 persons was observed in the forest travelling from Cyangugu back toward the east.

6. The border bridge in Cyangugu (Rusizi I) is once again open to travellers, staffed by GoR Immigration and Customs officials. Local Gendarme officers indicated that the bridge was officially reopened on 25 August. Refugees, however, are still being routed down to the border crossing at Rusizi II. At Rusizi II, refugee crossing is permitted only when UNHCR trucks are present on the Zaire side of the border to carry the refugees to camps south of Bukavu. 60 refugees per truck are then reportedly allowed to cross at a time. There was a backlog of only an estimated 2000 refugees waiting to enter Zaire the morning of 27 August. The NGO, "Goal," has established a medical station at Rusizi II, and both Cyangugu Gendarmes and Ethiopian peacekeepers are available to maintain order and security. A food market has sprung up near the crossing, and the mood of the refugees was one of patience. No/no refugees or displaced persons were observed in Cyangugu or Kamembe.

7. A significant Ethiopian military presence was observed the afternoon of 26 August from the western edge of the Nyungwe Forest to Cyangugu, within the town of Cyangugu itself, and then along the roads to both Rusizi II and Bugarama. On the morning of 27 August, however, there were Ethiopian troops at the Cyangugu bridge, and at the Electrogaz transformer station and the border crossing in Rusizi II, but no peacekeepers were seen between the airport at Kamembe and the road junction at Ntendezi, where the road to Kibuye turns off. (Note: Pol-Miloff believes that all of the Ethiopian mobile patrols, as well as the personnel at the roadside checkpoints, are brought in to their base camp at Kamembe Airport each night, then re-positioned mid- to late-morning daily.) At the Kamembe Airport, the Ethiopians have positioned five BTR-80 armored vehicles and dug mortar pits to provide 360 degrees security. Comment: If the Ethiopians at the airport do not soon receive some

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public health support, or begin practicing proper field sanitation procedures, they will be at risk of serious refugee-type health problems, as they are currently defecating between their pup tents or wherever the need strikes them. End comment.

8. No movement of refugees was observed on the road between Cyangugu and Kibuye. Of interest, however, was the presence of one young male dressed in a complete FAR army uniform, but without web gear or weapon. He was walking north toward Kibuye some 22 kilometers north of Ntendezi. UNAMIR's Franco-phone African Battalion had a checkpoint at the village of Gishyita, some 20 kilometers south of Kibuye.

9. Kibuye itself appeared calm, with a thriving market. UNAMIR personnel there reported that the area remains calm.

10. UNAMIR was operating a mobile armored patrol on the road toward Gitarama, where two Senegalese Panhards were observed at the road junction at Mabanza.

11. At the village of Ndaba, at the "border" of the HPZ, Pol-Miloff observed nine cargo trucks carrying returnees being inspected by RPA soldiers. Six of the 5-ton trucks belonged to UNAMIR, and three similar trucks bore WFP markings. A UNAMIR Military Observer accompanying the trucks reported that they were transporting 449 displaced persons from Kibuye to Gitarama and Kigali.

12. At the "border crossing" village of Ndaba, Pol-Miloff observed 35-40 RPA soldiers. Later, on the road between Ndaba and Gitarama, Pol-Miloff observed an additional three pickup trucks carrying an estimated 35 RPA personnel moving westward toward Ndaba.

13. Most of the villages between Kibuye and Gitarama appeared to have a majority of their population present. In the countryside, numerous people were working on their farms. The sole exception was the village of Kimumu, which was completely empty.

14. At the village of Mushabati the Pol-Miloff observed a half-full bus (Japan-Rwanda Cooperation bus), with the identified destination of Kibuye, heading westward.

15. Comment. The transition from the French to UNAMIR for security of the HPZ seems to have gone surprisingly well. The

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numbers present at displaced persons camps has dropped noticeably, and the population density within the HPZ decreased dramatically. The majority of the departures have seemingly returned to GoR controlled areas of Rwanda. End comment.

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